



File Code: 2670

Date: NOV 27 1997

Dr. Ralph Morgenweck
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Denver Federal Center
PO Box 25486
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Dr. Morgenweck:

We are taking this opportunity to comment on the Grizzly Bear Recovery in the Bitterroot Ecosystem Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). As your cooperating partner, we support the goals of the Endangered Species Act, the recovery of the grizzly bear and the citizens management committee concept.

1 We believe that the success of this endeavor hinges upon broad public acceptance of a method for bear recovery. The decision-making process should allow more time for an active public outreach program that reaches down to county and local groups, elected officials, and concerned individuals. We are pleased to share Laird Robinson, with his years of public affairs experience and skills, to help accomplish this public outreach.

2 The preferred alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement did not garner strong public support at the recently held public hearings in Montana and Idaho. One approach would be for the EIS Team to take the public's written and oral comments and fashion a more supportable alternative between the draft and final EIS.

The proposed reintroduction schedule for the preferred alternative seems ambitious given the need to have the broader base of public support discussed above. Adequate time should be added to the reintroduction schedule for this alternative.

3 The EIS needs to directly address the question, raised by a number of interested publics, of the adequacy of the habitat in the recovery area to support the target grizzly bear population. We suspect the area in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness would support a low density of grizzly bears. The Fish and Wildlife Service may want to consider reconfiguring the recovery area.

4 The Bitterroot recovery effort should not impede or detract in other ways from grizzly recovery in the Yellowstone or Northern Continental Divide ecosystems. Recovery successes such as delisting of the bear in the Yellowstone ecosystem are needed to foster public acceptance of endangered species recovery, including the Bitterroot grizzly.

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The Yellowstone and Northern Continental Divide Ecosystems are potential sources for bears. We believe it would be wise to take bears from these areas only if it does not impact the recovery goals in either ecosystem. Bears from these two ecosystems should indeed be "surplus" and their removal to the Bitterroot should not count toward the mortality limit.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We are looking forward to continuing the strong collaborative relationship we have enjoyed with you in this project.



DALE BOSWORTH
Regional Forester, R-1

for 

JACK BLACKWELL
Acting Regional Forester, R-4

cc: Chris Servheen